



House of Commons Debates

FOURTH SESSION—SIXTH PARLIAMENT.

SPEECHES OF HON. EDWARD BLAKE, M.P., ON THE ELECTORAL FRANCHISE.

FRIDAY, MAY 9TH, 1890.

Mr. BLAKE. It may be desirable to have a special provision for a particular case, although it is obvious that there would be danger in adopting the suggestion of the hon. member for Algoma (Mr. Dawson), because it would give the hon. gentleman's voters the opportunity of voting "early and often" with greater facility. But it is very dangerous to apply the argument that because a special district requires special legislation, that legislation should be made generally applicable. Let me make this suggestion to the hon. Secretary of State: The hon. gentleman says the reason for his change is because a particular revising officer has been under the impression that the law permitted him to make polling districts of any size he pleased. I think, Sir, that while it might be expedient to provide against injustice arising from some error of a revising officer, so as to avoid the disfranchisement of voters; it is very inexpedient that we should open any wider door for the revising officer to decline doing his full duty. I would suggest to the Secretary of State the advisability at the same time at which he makes provision for a possible neglect or error of duty, of making it still clearer what that duty is. He tells us that a revising officer, who is also a judge of the Superior Court, has construed it to be within his duty, deliberately to make a polling division comprising some 1,100 voters. I do not understand that to be the intention of the law. I understand it to be the duty of the revising officer to restrict the number to 250 voters. If we alter the law as it stood, and add this provision, we will be rendering it more likely that similar results will happen in the future. There are two several classes of cases which occur to me. I think it may very often happen that a revising officer, through error, or perhaps thinking it reasonable, may allow a small number of fifteen or twenty votes in a polling division, more than the maximum. That would be amply satisfied, I think, by just leaving things as they are. I believe there is no difficulty in polling at the one place a larger number than our maximum, and I believe it would be less evil to permit, within a moderate limitation of that kind, the division to remain undisturbed, than to allow the returning officer,

a week before the election, in the case of an error of that kind, to dislocate the appointed divisions. There is really no necessity for it in the great number of cases for which we may be expected to provide. Such an exceptional case as the hon. the Secretary of State cites to us as one to be provided against, would be provided against chiefly by making the law very plain, so that he who runs may read, and by stating that it is the duty of the revising officer to divide the polling sub-divisions for each 200 or 250 voters. As my hon. friend has said, we have known in days that are past, very great improprieties committed by returning officers in reference to the discharge of discretionary duties. I have had before me an authenticated instance wherein, at the last general election, a polling station was established, not in the most convenient or central place, but in a place extremely inconvenient to the greater number of the voters who happened to be of one party, and thus creating an absolute injustice. I am not disposed to give to the returning officer, who is appointed shortly before an election, who is appointed at the will of the Government, frequently upon the nomination of the candidate, and who is acting in the heat of a contest, and largely at the suggestion of a candidate—any more discretionary powers than we can avoid. Some such powers he must have, but I think we should limit them to the utmost.

Mr. BLAKE. I do not understand that it is limited in point of time, but that it will be perpetually engrafted on the law, so that after the next revision, if you should find that a dozen revising officers had made the same default of duty, you would find a dozen returning officers performing the same duty.

PATENT BALLOT BOXES.

Mr. BLAKE. I thought this must be an *ex post facto* arrangement, and that it was not really designed that the Committee should send for persons at this late stage of the Session. I do not think that these persons should be paid their expenses for coming here in pursuit of their own business, and, for my part, I shall object to it.

Mr. BLAKE. I do not think the case is at all parallel to any case we have had before. It was purely in their own interest that these people came here. They came in the hope that their inventions would be adopted, and that they would make money out of them. It seems to be out of the question that we should pay them for three attendances here, and their travelling expenses besides. If we sanction this now, where are we going to draw the line? There is a trial recommended of three of these ballot boxes, and are we going to pay these men for the preliminary use of their invention?

Mr. CHAPLEAU. The hon. gentleman evidently thinks that anything but his own advice or conclusions are absolutely to be disregarded.

Mr. BLAKE. No.

Mr. CHAPLEAU. Instead of making the remarks that the hon. gentleman has just favored the House with, he should have appeared before the Committee and witnessed what was done. He sent, it is true, a suggestion from one of the returning officers; one of his own friends, I presume.

Mr. BLAKE. No, it was for Mr. Blackburn, the former editor of the *London Free Press*, and now registrar of Middlesex.

PRINTING OF PARLIAMENT.

Mr. BLAKE. That clause is expunged. I quite agree in the view that it ought to be expunged, because it would be contrary to the statute which provides for the payment of the indemnity. At the same time, we have been made acquainted with this regrettable fact—I think by the Auditor General's Report—that a very considerable sum is owing in the way of arrears on this account. That ought not to happen, and, if hon. members take advantage of the provision, by which they can obtain public documents at cost price, and do not pay for them, I think the circumstances should be made known. I propose, on the first day of the next Session of Parliament, to move for the names of the members who remain in arrears. We have talked a good deal about clubs here to-day, and we know there is a very good system in clubs of posting the members who are in arrears. I shall propose to post those members of this House who are in arrears in this way.

LAND GRANTS TO RAILWAYS.

(In the Committee.)

On resolution 1,

That it is expedient to authorise the Governor in Council to grant to the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, Dominion lands to an extent not exceeding six thousand four hundred acres per mile for a branch line to be constructed from Glenboro' westerly, a distance of about sixty miles, to a point on the proposed branch railway of the said company running from Brandon south-westerly.

Mr. BLAKE. I recollect very well that, during the discussion on the charter which was proposed to be granted to the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, with all its aids in land and money, one of the reasons given for the large subsidies granted at that time was that they were necessary for, and in the interest of the country because the company were expecting themselves to construct and

were to count on their constructing branch lines through the North-West by means of these grants. I find now that it is proposed to give large subsidies to the Canadian Pacific Railway Company for the construction of those branch lines which we were told they would build in consequence of receiving those large grants of money and land. I would ask the Government to say why this departure is made from the policy enunciated in 1880-81?

Mr. DEWDNEY. The line from Glenboro' westward constitutes a portion of a line which, I think, was originally called the Winnipeg South-Western. There were two South-Western Railways, and the charters were purchased from the parties who held them by the Canadian Pacific Railway, so that the first resolution would not come under the objection of the hon. gentleman.

Mr. BLAKE. I am quite aware, from the lie of the ground and from seeing the map, that this piece does not run from the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway, but is connected with a branch line which the company has acquired. But it was a part of the understanding with the Canadian Pacific Railway Company that the branches were to be constructed at their expense. The Canadian Pacific Railway Company took over a branch which had been subsidised by the country, and now it is proposed that an additional piece shall be added to that by the company at our expense in part.

Mr. BLAKE. When first the policy of aiding railways in the North-West by land grants was brought before the House, independently of the great grant to the Canadian Pacific Railway, in regard to which grant somewhat special reasons were adduced, I advanced this view: that although it was eminently advantageous, and it was absolutely necessary, that railways should be built through the North-West; although it was extremely reasonable that that country should bear, by the means we were proposing, a considerable portion of the burdens involved in the construction of those enterprises; yet, still, it was of the greatest possible consequence that we should devise some means to avoid the locking up of large quantities of land, and particularly the locking up of those areas of land alongside the lines of railway, which would be the first desired for settlement, and more especially when these were alternating with free grant sections, which would be sought for before the sections which were to be obtainable only by payment. We know that, during the period in which there was a considerable immigration and an excitement with respect to the values of land in the North-West, the suggestion that advantage would be taken by the railway corporations of their power as land holders, was realised. We know that their behavior was such as indeed we could not complain of; that it had respect to what they thought their interest under the circumstances; and that they raised the prices of their lands, as they had a legal right to do, as we who granted them without condition had no right to condemn, to the highest point that the then inflated condition of the market would, it was thought, allow. Lands, which had been saleable at \$1, \$1.50 or \$2 per acre were raised to \$5, \$6 and even \$8 per acre, and sale and settlement were checked, and the country was in-

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jured. The settlement of the country is effected very satisfactorily indeed under those conditions which allow two or three members of a family or two or three close and intimate friends to go together. One of the great difficulties in a new country like the North-West is the separation of the settlers, at the best, from the aggregates of population. That difficulty they must encounter until towns grow; that difficulty is made greater in the North-West by reason of the large areas which we allow for the individual settler, and which make him in a sense remote even from his immediate neighbor. But that difficulty is intensified when under our principles of settlement there is going to be settlement in the first instance only in alternate sections; when you have a set of sections for sale along the railway, and a free grant set of sections, alternating with each other. It is obvious, except in the case of an immigrant who has considerable capital, that a settler will be almost driven to say "the capital I have must be put into fencing and buildings and into implements and breaking the land, and I cannot afford to pay a price for the land;" and, therefore, you have these inevitable difficulties to some extent intensified, even by any system under which there will be a check on free settlement. We cannot avoid that, we cannot eat our cake and have our cake. If it is necessary to make these railway grants to secure the construction of roads, we must do so on the least disadvantageous terms to the public consistent with reasonable advantage to the railways. When these grants were proposed and submitted to the House, I submitted a motion, which will be found recorded in the Journals of the House, for a vote was taken upon it, that the grants should be made only on condition that the areas granted of agricultural lands (I did not speak of land with mill privileges or station grounds or town sites, or other special values, but only of ordinary agricultural lands) should be open for sale on reasonable conditions for actual settlement and in reasonable areas, at a price not exceeding a maximum to be fixed. My object was to ensure that a man who goes out to that country to hunt for land, and takes a map on which he finds the alternate sections indicated, would know that if he has found a choice section on railway lands, he would be as certain to get that section if it had not been entered before, on coming back to the railway office and paying the stipulated price, as he would be certain on coming back to the Government office of getting the free grant which is adjoining it. He could thus choose his free grant, and for his neighbor or friend with whom he wished to live in proximity he could choose the railway land. By this means you would provide against the lock up of land which the hon. member for Muskoka (Mr. O'Brien) has referred to, and which may be a very serious evil. You would make this land as freely open for settlement as the Government lands, except on the addition of having to pay a certain sum. In the old times when I had an opportunity of taking an interest in these matters—an interest which the hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Davin) doubts a little sometimes, but which I can assure him, however misdirected was, at any rate, very sincere—I received complaints from persons who had been in that country and who said: "We went here and there and everywhere, and on coming back, having made one or

more selections, we found either that the land was a railway grant and we could not get it, or it was held by the Canadian Pacific Railway under that blanket grant of theirs, or it was in the hands of speculators, and we came back disheartened." Your system ought to be one which would leave open on plain terms to actual settlement, irrespective of the will of the railway company, the agricultural lands, out of which, notwithstanding your arrangement, the railway company shall derive a reasonable price. Name a maximum price, and let the lands, subject to the payment of that maximum by reasonable instalments, be open to settlement in reasonable areas. If you do that you diminish the difficulties inseparable from this question, to the greatest possible extent, and, if so minimised, the advantages of securing the construction of a railway are greater than the disadvantages of causing the partial lock up of lands necessary for its construction. I do fear, that if there comes again a time of considerable immigration to the North-West, and of considerable hunting for land, the reckless manner in which we have given, and are giving, these grants will prove in the future, as it has proved in the past, to be a greater obstacle to the settlement of that country than might exist if a different system were adopted. It is all very well to repeat the arguments with which I was met in former years, namely, that it is in the interest of the railway company to sell, and that we may be quite sure they will be glad to set a low price on the land. We have heard that before, and we have had an example of the short-sighted policy in the period of inflation to which I have referred, which prevented settlement just because it was thought a little more money might be obtained later on. I do not want these lands to be used for speculation, either by the individual buyers or by the railway company itself. I want them to be charged, in favor of the railway company, with a reasonably fair price for the settlers to pay; and while subject to that charge, that they shall be as free and open to the settlers as if they were Government free grants of lands.

On resolution 1.

MR. BLAKE. To the difficulties that beset the consideration of this question, the hon. member for Lisgar (Mr. Ross) has added other alleged difficulties which do not in fact exist. He has spoken about coal lands, timber lands, and lands in the immediate vicinity of stations and town sites being included. What is the suggestion I made to the House? I excluded lands of this character; I limited my suggestion to ordinary agricultural lands. Lands which the company might have a right to hold as having special values, which did not come within this denomination—lands having a special value, such as coal lands, timber lands, town sites or expected town sites, could, by a very easy arrangement, be withdrawn from the operation of the regulation which would apply, by arrangements to be prescribed by the Government, under the general direction of Parliament, a maximum to ordinary agricultural lands alone. I admit that there are some real difficulties to which the hon. gentleman has alluded, but which also he has exaggerated. He has supposed that my suggestion necessarily applied one maximum to all rail-

way grants. Not at all. It is not necessary, when you are dealing with the lands of one railway company, to apply the same maximum which you would apply with reference to the lands of another. For instance, there is a railway enterprise in which I understand the hon. member for Lisgar (Mr. Ross) takes a great deal of patriotic interest—the Hudson Bay Railway Company. No one can suppose it would be reasonable to apply the same minimum or maximum to that, which would apply to some of the others. But why complicate unfairly and unreasonably a practical suggestion, whatever its difficulties, by adding these absurd notions of difficulty which the hon. gentleman entertains? We are now dealing with one grant; we are now dealing with one locality; we are now dealing with a certain mileage of railway in one part of the North-West Territories; and we are called upon therefore, if we deal with it intelligently, to determine what maximum should be applied to ordinary agricultural lands in the region of that grant. Even there, there may be great variations in the characters of the lands which will be allotted to the company. There, also, you cannot have a perfect plan because your maximum must have regard, I will not say to the choicest morsels, but to the highest class of agricultural land properties in the grant. No doubt consideration has been given by the Administration to those questions. I presume the Minister who is proposing the grant, and the Minister of Railways—for I suppose they are jointly responsible—have considered what are the difficulties and probable cost of construction; what the prospects of traffic are, and the general qualities of the lands along this proposed railway, in respect of which this grant of 6,400 acres per mile is to be given. If

this, as a branch railway, is going to cost \$12,800 a mile, and if we are to suppose those lands, including timber lands, coal lands, town sites and so forth, have only to-day an average cash value of \$2 per acre, we are giving the cost of the road. If the road will cost \$18,000 or \$19,000 a mile equipped, we still are making a free gift of two-thirds of the cost, averaging the lands at \$2 per acre. I do not know, we have not the slightest information as to whether there are any special difficulties of construction, whether there are "any more rivers to cross;" whether the bridging, the grading, the excavation and so on, is expensive. I do not know what the particular character of the land is. Upon that no information is vouchsafed. Sir, the Government policy does not regard the difficulties suggested by the hon. member for Lisgar. The grant is 6,400 acres per mile all round, no matter whether the road be easy or difficult to build; no matter whether it is one immediately promising a large traffic or promising only a large traffic in the future; no matter whether the lands are more or less valuable. Except in the case of the Galt Road, 6,400 acres is the general acreage given per mile. We are entitled to ask the grounds of the Government's conclusion. We are entitled to know whether the Government have considered these things—whether they have considered what the probable cost of the road will be, what will be the probable results to the company of the road, what the probable value of this land grant will be? We are entitled to know whether the Government have been appropriating this land grant of 6,400 acres per mile, with some regard to those considerations, or whether it is all pure guess work, or whether there has not even been a guess.

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